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Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 03159 060636Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSM-03 AF-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13 OMB-01 TRSE-00 COME-00
EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 DHA-02 /097 W
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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6012
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IS
SUBJECT: THE ARAB VOTERS AND RAKAH

REF: TEL AVIV 2882

BEGIN SUMMARY: AN OFFICIAL OF THE HISTADRUT ESTIMATES THAT ENOUGH ARAB VOTES WOULD GO TO RAKAH TO GIVE THAT PARTY SEVEN OR EIGHT KNESSET MEMBERS. THESE ARABS WHO ARE OPPOSED TO VOTING FOR A COMMUNIST PARTY WILL PROBABLY ABSTAIN IN LARGE NUMBERS. THE OFFICIAL FORESAW AN IMPROVEMENT OF ARAB RELATIONS IF PERES BECOMES PRIME MINISTER. PERES HAS PROMISED THAT HE WOULD CONSULT DIRECTLY WITH ARAB LEADERS ON MATTERS PERTAINING TO THEIR COMMUNITY. A RAKAH DELEGATION MET WITH PLO REPRESENTATIVES IN PRAGUE THIS WEEK AND SHELI HAS COME OUT IN SUPPORT OF ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM EAST JERUSALEM. THE IMPACT OF THESE TWO DEVELOPMENTS WILL BE MIXED--ATTRACTING THE ARAB VOTERS AND REPELLING JEWISH ONES.
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 03159 060636Z

END SUMMARY.

1. NAUAF MASSALHA OF THE HISTADRUT ARAB DEPARTMENT AND A LABOR PARTY ACTIVIST TOLD THE LABOR ATTACHE THAT ARAB VOTERS WOULD MAINTAIN THEIR STRONG SUPPORT OF RAKAH ON ELECTION DAY AND ELECT SEVEN OR EIGHT RAKAH KNESSET MEMBERS. (COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THIS IS

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM, POLLSTER HANOCH SMITH DISAGREES AND ARGUES THAT TO GET SEVEN OR EIGHT SEATS, RAKAH WOULD HAVE TO GET VIRTUALLY ALL THE ARAB VOTES. HE PREDICTS SIX RAKAH SEATS AT THE MOST.) EFFORTS BY SEVERAL NEWLY EMERGED ARAB NATIONALIST AND RADICAL LEFTIST GROUPS TO DISCREDIT RAKAH'S "DEMOCRATIC FRONT" BY CHARGING THAT IT IS JEWISH DOMINATED, THAT THE ARAB LEADERS OF RAKAH HAD REFUSED TO FORM A SEPARATE ARAB LIST, ARE NOT LIKELY TO DIMINISH THE PRO-RAKAH VOTE. THE LEFT-WING SOCIALIST SHELI GROUP, WHICH SEEKS TO IMPRESS ARAB VOTERS WITH THE FACT THAT SEVERAL OF ITS LEADERS (ARYE ELIAV, MEIR PA'IL, AND URI AVNERI) HAVE HAD CONTACTS WITH PLO REPRESENTATIVES MAY GAIN 6-7,000 ARAB VOTES, BUT WILL NOT SIGNIFICANTLY DETRACT FROM RAKAH'S SUPPORT.

2. AMONG THSOSE ARABS WHO FOR IDEOLOGICAL AND TRADITIONALIST REASONS ARE OPPOSED TO VOTING FOR A COMMUNIST PARTY, THE RATE OF ABSTENTION CAN BE EXPECTED TO BE FAIRLY HIGH. MASSALHA ESTIMATES THAT AS A RESULT OF THE RECENT INCIDENTS AT BAKA EL GHARBIYA AND JATT ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE LAND DAY RIOTS IN THE GALILEE, GOVERNMENT RELUCTANCE TO INVESTIGATE THAT INCIDENT, AND THE GENERAL RESENTMENT ON THE PART OF GENERALLY PRO-ESTABLISHMENT ARABS THAT THE LABOR PARTY HAD IGNORED THEM, THE PRO-ALIGNMENT UNITED ARAB LIST WILL GET NO MORE THAN 25,000 VOTES. THUS ONLY SEIF EL DIN EL ZUNABI, WHO HEADS THE LIST, HAS A CHANCE OF BEING RE-ELECTED. BEDOUIN SHEIK
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RABIYA AND DRUSE LEADER MUADI (DEPUTY MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE) ARE ALMOST CERTAIN TO LOSE THEIR KNESSET SEATS. THE ARAB REFORM MOVEMENT LIST OF MUHAMMAD ABASSI IS NOT LIKELY TO ATTRACT MORE THAN 4-5,000 VOTES.

3. THE MAPAM CANDIDATE IBRAHIM SHEBAT, NUMBER 20 ON THE ALIGNMENT LIST, WILL ATTRACT NO MORE THAN A FEW THOUSAND VOTES, MOSTLY FROM THE HAIFA AREA. THE MAJORITY OF MAPAM'S SMALL ARAB VOTE WILL PROBABLY SHIFT TO SHELI.

4. AS FOR THE TWO DRUSE CANDIDATES ON THE DMC LIST, MASSALHA GIVES SHAFFIK (NUMBER 12) AND ATASHY (NUMBER 13) MARGINAL CHANCES. (MOST OBSERVERS FEEL DMC WILL GET 12 TO 15 SEATS.) HE ALSO FEELS THAT KAMAL EL DIN OF THE LIKUD (NUMBER 39) HAS LITTLE CHANCE OF GAINING A KNESSET SEAT.

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

5. COMMENTING ON PERES' ATTITUDE TOWARD THE ARAB COMMUNITY, MASSALHA FORESAW AN IMPROVEMENT OF ARAB RELATIONS WITH THE LABOR PARTY. PERES HAD SPENT THE EVENING OF MAY 1 AT MASSALHA'S HOME IN KFAR KARI, AN ARAB VILLAGE IN THE TRIANGLE, WHERE HE MET WITH ARAB LEADERS FROM THE AREA. IN THE COURSE OF THE EVENING HE SOUGHT TO ASSURE HIS HOSTS THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD PAY MORE ATTENTION TO THEIR PROBLEMS. HE SAID THAT HE WOULD MOVE AWAY FROM PAST PRACTICE OF RELYING ON JEWISH "ARAB ADVISORS," AND WOULD CONSULT DIRECTLY WITH ARAB LEADERS ON MATTERS PERTAINING TO THEIR COMMUNITIES. HE ALSO TOLD MASSALHA THAT HE HOPED TO RELY ON HIM FOR IMPORTANT LIAISON FUNCTIONS WITH THE ARAB COMMUNITY.

6. TWO OTHER RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE NEWS MAY HAVE AN IMPACT ON ARAB VOTES--AND THE CHANCES OF
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RAKAH AND SHELI--IN THE ELECTION. IT HAS BEEN ANNOUNCED PUBLICLY THAT A RAKAH DELEGATION MET WITH PLO REPRESENTATIVES IN PRAGUE ON MAY 4. LOCAL MEDIA REPORTED THAT THE MEETING WAS "THE BEGINNING OF DEVELOPING RELATIONS" AND NOTED PUBLICLY, FOR THE FIRST TIME, THAT DELEGATIONS FROM THE TWO ORGANIZATIONS HAD PREVIOUSLY MET IN MOSCOW IN FEBRUARY OF LAST YEAR AND RECENTLY IN NEW YORK. THE SHELI PLATFORM, WHICH WAS MADE PUBLIC MAY 4, CONTAINS, AMONG OTHER THINGS, A PLANK WHICH SUPPORTS ISRAELI WITH-DRAWAL FROM EAST JERUSALEM AND THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF EAST JERUSALEM AS "THE CAPITAL OF THE INDEPENDENT PALESTINIAN STATE."

7. COMMENT: THE IMPACT OF THESE TWO DEVELOPMENTS WILL BE MIXED. THE NEWS OF RAKAH-PLO MEETINGS MAY ATTRACT SOME ADDITIONAL VOTES FROM ISRAELI ARABS. THE SHELI STATEMENT ABOUT EAST JERUSALEM MAY ALSO GAIN A FEW ARAB VOTES BUT OUR JUDGMENT WOULD BE THAT THOSE GAINS WOULD BE MORE THAN OFFSET BY THE LOSS OF POTENTIAL JEWISH VOTES.
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